Nixon, Mitchell are targets

DA carries wit into courtroom

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By ALLAN KATZ

A calm and confident District Atty. Jim Garrison, firing pungent verbal volleys at the Justice Department and President Nixon, walked into court yesterday for the biggest trial of his life—apparently feeling no tension.

"It is an honor to be prosecuted by the most corrupt administration in the 200-year history of our nation, in a case prepared by the late John Mitchell," Garrison told reporters as he entered court yesterday for his trial with two others on charges of accepting bribes to protect pinball gambling.

The reference to the "late John Mitchell" was apparently a humorous reference to the former attorney general's departure from public life. Mitchell, of course, is still very much alive.

LATER, AFTER newsmen had heard of the alleged plot here to kill Nixon, Garrison was asked if he would attempt to prosecute from his office in New Orleans.

"Philosophically speaking, I am not sure that an attempt to assasinate President Nixon qualifies as a crime," Garrison said.

Even newsmen were surprised by the violence implicit in the remark, but Garrison said it so calmly that he might have been discussing the weather. The DA regards the President as a political enemy.

Entering the courtroom, Garrison seemed completely serene. He walked past the panel of 100 prospective jurors and sat alone at the table reserved for the defendants and their attorneys.

HE RIFFLED through lists of prospective jurors calmly, horn-rimmed glasses perched low on his nose, in the manner of a man in his living room going through the mail.

Later, as the selection of jurors began, Garrison sat quietly with his attorneys, occasionally whispering to them but mostly keeping his own counsel.

During a break, he walked over to the table where newsmen and several artists hired by news agencies sat working. Garrison chatted with the artists about the likenesses of him they were drawing. He chatted informally with reporters about the rapidly improving state of his health, about New Orleans politics and about the past.

Of his health, he said, "After so many years of being in physical pain every day, I feel back together again for the first time in a long time.

"YOU CAN'T imagine how good it feels to be back together again in a physical sense. It's been a long time coming."

Garrison has been troubled by a bad back in recent years. During his repartee with reporters, he displayed the quick wit and often-pungent humor that had been noticeably absent during the recent years of illness.

Overall, the DA seemed so serene and unconcerned that one U.S. marshal commented as Garrison left the court that "he's as calm as a man returning to the same fishing hole for the 2,000th time."